The Sunday Tribune's News and Reviews of Books and Authors

The History of a Family

By Burton Rascoe

THE OLD HOUSE. By Cecile Tormay. Translated from the Hungarian by E. Torday. Published by Robert M. McBride & Co. New York: 1922.

IN THIS fine and impressive novel the author has achieved a curious and unusual effect. She or the translator has managed the succession of short, staccato sentences in such a manner that even in a whole book unrelieved by longer periods there is no nervous agitation in the narrative, but instead there is a lulling and haunting quality. This is a matter of connecting cadences so that the full stop does not interrupt the rhythm; but the other effect is less obvious. Everything is peaceful and quiet in the story, and yet in it the most tragic and dramatic events take place. There are wars and murders, brutality, disgrace, sorrow and death depicted with a hush of wistful melancholy. One recalls at once, in contrast, the treatment of similar episodes employed by that other novelist of the now disintegrated Central empires, Jacob Wasserman, who, in "The World Illusion," relates tragedy kaleidoscopically and in sharp relief and makes of it a matter of overweening importance.

The explanation of this effect, I believe, lies in the fact that the novel treats essentially and superbly of childhood and old age. The middle period of storm and stress is not emphasized. The reader, then, is permitted to view turmoil through the detached and apathetic eyes of children and of aged people. Children take little cognizance of adult tragedy and they are not disturbed by it, except in so far as they are directly and intimately concerned with its results, for they are not yet old or experienced enough to realize what it means. And in old age one has reached that degree of happy unconcern wherein one is never distrait because one knows that whatever happens it does not matter particularly. Thus has Miss Tormay contrived a delicate irony and at the same time succeeded in an aim at impersonality and detachment.

In the delineation of childhood and old age few authors have even approached the success of Miss Tormay. To give an air of verity to a treatment of the point of view of childhood and of senility is one of the most difficult of literary tasks. Few have been able to achieve even one of these double aims. Couperus, the great Dutch novelist, has, perhaps better than any one else, dealt accurately, minutely and perfectly with old age. Miss Tormay is, I think, Couperus's nearest rival.

The story has strength and beauty and overtones of sadness. It relates the history of the Ulwing family in relation to the house which Christopher Ulwing built and his children and grandchildren occupy. Christopher is of the Viking type, a rugged, full-blooded, energetic pioneer who builds his fortune and founds his family upon the rock of independence and power. The Ulwing house is near Pest, the twin city of Buda, on the Danube. Christopher is an aging man, patiently awaiting death, his work done, his children scarcely tolerant of him, when the story opens. Christopher finds in his grandchild, Anne, a tie of understanding and sympathy: they are both at the poles which are out of contact with the middle years. The blood thins and the vitality weakens with each successive generation, and one sees in the grandson and granddaughters the degeneration of the stock into weakness and physical frailty.

Miss Tormay has presented each phase of this family history with remarkable psychological insight. The interplay of character she has managed with a dexterous hand, giving to each conflict of personalities a dramatic significance. The atmosphere of fatality involving helpless human beings is preserved throughout the very human, sympathetic and sorrowful history. It is, in fine, a distinguished and beautiful work of fiction, meriting that burst of critical and popular enthusiasm which greeted its appearance in Hungary some years ago.

Ralph Barton has caricatured the contributors to "Harper's Bazar" for the September issue of that magazine. From left to right, beginning with the lower row, are (1) Erte, (2) Margery Williams Bianco, (3) Pamela Bianco, (4) Katherine Sturges, (5) Mildred Cram, (6) Lady Duff-Gordon, (7) Henri Bendel, (8) Mrs. Frederick Y. Dalziel, (9) W. L. George, (10) Stephen Vincent Benet, (11) Gilbert K. Chesterton, (12) Etienne Drian, (13) George Bellows, (14) Dean Cornwell, (15) E. F. Benson, (16) Arnold Bennett, (17) Maurice Bower, (18) Rachel Crothers, (19) Gertrude Atherton, (20) Lord Dunsany, (21) Mrs. Larz Anderson, (22) Laurids Bruun, (23) Acquisitive Connoisseur, (24) Lucian Cary, (25) Josephine Daskam Bacon, (26) Jean Gabriel Domergue, (27) Charles Collins, (28) Grace Corson, (29) George Agnew Chamberlain, (30) C. LeRoy Baldridge, (31) Ralph (Himself) Barton. (Courtesy of Harper's Bazar.)

Ladies First

By Isabel Paterson

ASCENT. by Frances Rumsey. Boni & Liveright.
LOVE. By Leonie Aminoff. E. P. Dutton & Co.
SEA WRACK. By Vere Hutchinson. Century Co.

THE problem of being a lady in America is very nearly as difficult as avoiding the sin against the Holy Ghost. Nobody knows exactly what constitutes either; therefore, how shall we be saved? Now in Europe—though even there the old certainties begin to crumble around the edge—you know where you are. So many generations removed from the degradation of toil, such and such passports from Burke and Debrett and the Almanach de Gotha to Court or County, and you are secure. It doesn't matter a bit what you do; Queen Bess could swear like a trooper and box the ears of her maids of honor; Queen Victoria might have a liking for Landseer or Hollands and tuck a napkin as big as a teacloth under her third chin; but they were ladies as indubitably as they were queens, just as the maids of honor lost none of it by acquiring a "thick ear." Read the Margravine of Anspach if you would learn how substantial is real aristocracy; they could say it with bungstarters and the sanguinary consequences would be none the less blue. They were the children of grace, vessels of election. They needed not to make broad their phylacteries, nor tithe anise and cumin and mint at the altar of gentility, culture, taste or any such minor deities.

The lady as an ideal rather than a material being is almost purely an American invention. She is not at ease in Zion; unhappy creature, she must be refined, or she is lost. And refinement—what is it?

According to our most refined authors, it consists largely in an inflexible determination to call a spade a teaspoon, to ignore unpleasant facts. And our authors are the most refined in the world, when they set out to be. There is a tradition, a cult, a galaxy of them. Through and by Henry James the transcendentalism of nineteenth century New England has been transformed to apply to manners and social observances rather than morals and ethics. And the lady is their standard and pattern.

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OF THIS galaxy Frances Rumsey is the latest star. It is a bit difficult to estimate her magnitude, because, like the others, she surrounds herself with a nebula of vaporous words—her style enfolds her meanings in layer upon layer of gauzy implications. This is the accepted method. To change the metaphor they make their definitions after the manner of a knife-thrower in a circus, outlining the subject with glittering daggers of phrases, but never, if truly skillful, drawing blood. Regrettably, the victim sometimes calmly removes from the background, leaving nothing but an empty space.

One feels that Miss Rumsey's target, Olive Lacy Devon, the heroine of "Ascent," has thus escaped. Or was she ever anything but a shifting wraith? She is presented as a woman with neither passions nor principles, is such a creature humanly possible? Excepting that she is a lady throughout, all that she is capable of is a cold ambition for her own social advancement and a craving for beauty in her surroundings—a parisitical craving, for she has no creative impulse, only an acquisitive one. Deliberately she sets out to marry—and does marry—the only rich man of her acquaintance. Extraordinarily, he is depicted as loving her to the last. What he nourished that love upon, heaven knows! Her cool correctitude never modulates into any warmth or intimacy even in the marriage bond. Even though she presents him with a child the reader can only suppose that the infant must have been propagated by conversation, and that of the most abstract nature.

Evidently Olive regrets, selfishly, the deficiencies of her emotional equipment; but her attempts to repair them are singular. Reaching for religion, she attempts to ensnare the priest to whom she has applied for help. But whether it is mere envy, or the need of a tangible object, or a genuine inclination toward him, one cannot be sure. Here, as throughout the story, her acknowledged limitations make her actions appear inexplicable and meaningless. Her abortive love affairs are only illustrative of a naïve belief on the part of the author that a cad is not a cad if he is a European. At the end Olive dies as irrelevantly as she lived. What Miss Rumsey has attempted in character drawing is what George Moore achieved in his "Mildred Lawson." Yet it is an interesting attempt, if only as an illumination of a certain point of view.

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THE creation of an aristocracy, of which ladyhood is a mere fringe, may be studied indirectly from "Love," the second novel of Leonie Aminoff's twelve-part series of Napoleonic romances. Napoleon's love for Josephine is the phase of his life here dealt with; but his burning ambition animates the book, for it is the man himself. He knew, as Anatole France has said, that power and nothing else—power, however acquired and maintained, whether by gold or edged steel—is the essence of aristocracy. He had seen all the elegant accessories of life swept into the gutter when the power behind them failed; but what matter? When his turn came, he made duchesses out of washerwomen in proof that he could do the trick as well as any Hapsburg or Capet that ever lived and died and went to dust. Those things are only by-products. If she had enchained Napoleon's fancy, Mme. Tallien might as well have been Empress as Mme. Beauharnais and mothered a long line of kings and princesses. She was no worse and much handsomer than many who have worn diadems. But she comes down to us as a hussy; Josephine as a figure of romance, a gracious and unhappy lady.

The author follows a good model in her style and construction. She revives the manner of the elder Dumas, but she has not his teeming imagination and boundless energy.

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GENTILITY is the last and least concern of Vere Hutchinson in "Sea Wrack." Her master is palpably Joseph Conrad; one would say she has doublet and hose in her disposition. She doesn't fill his sea boots; who can? Curiously, she is the second woman writer to essay them; Miss Sackville-West was before her. And both have a genuine emotional quality, a sense of the great invisible forces of life, of the kinship of mankind with the immemorial verities of earth and sea. In spite of her borrowed style and furbished-up stock plot—the self-sacrificing daughter who marries a man she hates to redeem the mortgage on the old homestead, and the denouement brought about by the finding of a stolen will—her story is not without originality and power. It is more a promise than a performance, but it is a promise worth keeping, worth listening to.

Marriage Again

By Hunter Stagg

FOR RICHER FOR POORER. By Harold H. Armstrong ("Henry G. Aikman"). Alfred A. Knopf.

A THING I've always wanted to do is to start some deep research work into the matter of pen names, scouring Europe and America and the past centuries for all the thrilling information which this subject promises. The thrill would not, of course, be found simply in the reasons why some people choose to write under names other than their own, for scores of such reasons can be imagined, without effort by anybody. No, the thing which baffles the mind is what, exactly, has influenced the users of pen names to choose the particular ones they did choose, instead of any of a million others just as good. Think of finding out that! The very thought is stimulating. But I must wait at least till I have written something about the new novel by Mr. Harold H. Armstrong, who has published two other books under the name of "Henry G. Aikman."

Henry G. Aikman. . . A good name, certainly. But what were the mental processes which led Mr. Armstrong to that particular arrangement or syllables rather than say, George B. Carson or Gregory R. Smithers? What were the hidden forces which made him settle upon it, finally, discarding all the others, which he must have considered long and seriously. Another subject for wonder, in Mr. Armstrong's case, is why, having published two novels—the second a very popular one, too—under the name of Aikman, he now begins to use his real name. It must mean a lot of trouble for his publisher, who from now on is simply condemned to printing two names where one did well before, so that no reader of "Zell" may miss the fact that its author is identical with the author of "For Richer, for Poorer," and other novels to come.

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"Zell" I somehow did not read, but by way of opening a comment on "For Richer, for Poorer," I may say that I wish I had, and I shall certainly read the next novel by Harold H. Armstrong ("Henry G. Aikman"). For the present volume is a most likable piece of work, and, if the word hadn't become meaningless, might even be pronounced remarkable. It is the fashion, of course, to write novels of marriage, and it is the fashion, too, to make the characters in such novels "usual people." But in most cases the author manages to suggest a sort of secret understanding between himself and the reader, that he, at least, and the said reader are not usual people, but have just got together for a while to gaze down upon the poor silly creatures who are. The author tips you a wink, so to speak, and against your will you feel flattered and superior to all these commonplace asses innocently doing and saying commonplace things. And the effect thus gained is what, in the scarcity of the real thing, we know nowadays as satire.

In "For Richer, for Poorer," Mr. Armstrong establishes no such annoying understanding, and that is why the book is remarkable. His impecunious young married pair are commonplace to the last degree in their commonplace little apartment, but he manages to write about them as if he didn't in the least know it. He allows them to have their Great Hour, or Hours, without taking you behind the door immediately afterward to assure you that he knows—and knows *you* know—the hopeless usualness of it all. The result is that here's a story you can read in peace and quiet, with a feeling that it really is all between you and the characters: one in which you can recognize quite comfortably your own inanities and futilities without any insufferably knowing eye upon you, to jack you up to the proper mood of cynical tolerance.

Goodness knows how many dull stories of dull people have been carstanding trick, against which even the most intelligent readers are rarely proof. Professionally speaking it is one of the best tricks of the trade, taking, as it does, the place of so many things formerly considered necessities in an author's equipment. All the more notable is it, therefore, that Mr. Armstrong tells a dull tale of dull people without, apparently, being aware of this trick, and yet contrives to make a most appealing book of it. The story of his struggling little lawyer and wife is without any of the familiar complexities—without, indeed, any complexities at all—but by its sincerity and good clean writing it wins through to a high place on the fiction list of the season.

Notes

Pierre Loving is to edit a new series of one-set plays that Lieber & Lewis will publish. Both American and European examples will be included in this series.

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Stewart Edward White has spent the summer yachting up north. Reports a new big novel under way.

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"Flowing Gold" is the title of Rex Beach's new novel, his first in half a dozen years. It's a story of the Texas oil fields.

The Ten Best Sellers

The following books are reported by "The Bookman" as having the largest sale at leading bookstores throughout the country for the last month:

FICTION

"If Winter Comes," by A. S. M. Hutchinson (Little Brown). Sentimental and sympathetic exposition of a misunderstood man.

"Gentle Julia," by Booth Tarkington (Doubleday, Page). Julia collects masculine hearts, being too kind to refuse them.

"Marie Chapdelaine" by Louis Hémon (Macmillan). A tragic idyll of habitant life in the backwoods of Quebec.

"Brass," by Charles G. Norris (Dutton). A realistic study of marriage and divorce.

"The Head of the House of Coombe," by Frances Hodgson Burnett (Stokes). The thread of a charming love story drawn through the years of the World War.

"The Vehement Flame," by Margaret Deland (Harper). The jealousy of a middle-aged wife for her boy husband.

"Alice Adams," by Booth Tarkington (Doubleday, Page). The shabby-genteel tragedy of an American family on the downgrade.

"To the Last Man," by Zane Grey (Harper). Melodramatic tale of a feud in the cattle country of the Southwest.

"The Great Prince Shan," by E. Phillips Oppenheim (Little, Brown). Standard Oppenheim thriller, with an Oriental villain.

"Saint Teresa," by Henry Sydnor Harrison (Houghton Mifflin). The taming of a feminist shrew.

NON-FICTION

"An Outline of History," by H. G. Wells (Macmillan). A survey of our beginnings, middle, and possible end, by an up-to-date prophet.

"The Story of Mankind," by Hendrik W. Van Loon (Boni & Liveright). History made literature by a scholar and a humanist.

"The Americanization of Edward Bok," by Edward Bok (Scribner's). Autobiography of "The Ladies' Home Journal."

"Mind in the Making," by James Harvey Robinson (Harper). An explication of the origins and processes of human thought.

"The Mirrors of Washington," Anonymous (Putnam). Acidulous etchings of prominent politicians.

"Painted Windows," Anonymous (Putnam). Snapshots of the pillars of the Church of England.

"Outwitting Our Nerves," by Jackson and Salisbury (Century). The common-sense uses of psychology.

Two Victorian Novels

By Isabel Paterson

SPINSTER OF THIS PARISH. By W. B. Maxwell. Dodd, Mead & Co.
MARY LEE. By Geoffrey Dennis. Alfred A. Knopf.

SO EMINENTLY Victorian, as Mr. Lytton Strachey might say, are these two novels when contrasted with the average fiction product of to-day that they have something of the air of mammoths lingering belatedly into the Ice Age, notable by their mere bulk as they crash through the meager herbage of thaht inhospitable period. They have much in common beside their size. Each is largely concerned with the life of one woman, though both are written by men, and both authors sympathize with their heroines. Mary Lee is intended to be the more volcanic and emotional nature by her creator; she resembles to a marked degree certain of Charlotte Bronte's heroines, so strongly, indeed, that she has the air of a reminiscence rather than a creation. Mr. Maxwell's Emmeline Verinder, "spinster of this parish," wears all the outward semblance of an old maid, but her actions are heroical. She is more authentic. Perhaps she has a better right, a right of inheritance. Mr. Dennis is a beginner. Mr. Maxwell is not only an author of long standing, but the son of a popular novelist of the good Queen's day, M. E. Braddon.

He shows us Emmeline first as a pretty, prim young girl of the 1895 pattern, living with her parents in a big, rich, overstuffed house in Prince's Gate, and looking forward with sweet docility to making the right kind of marriage and living in another such house to the end of her well-ordered days. Mr. Maxwell's handling of interiors and his manner of conveying an atmosphere, a social milieu, is sure and charming. The paternal Verinder is one of those merchant princes who at that date dominated the upper middle class and had very little desire to break into the ranks of the hereditary aristocracy—like Mr. Galsworthy's Man of Property. They had just begun to patronize the arts, and occasionally enticed some "lion" of the season to roar at their larger parties. Thus Emmeline met her fate, in the person of Anthony Dyke, explorer and adventurer.

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Dyke was everything that the Verinders considered undesirable in the way of a parti. He was a roving, ranting blade, who spent his life in the wilds of Borneo or Australia or Africa. His chief ambition was to discover the South Pole. He had no fixed income. Worst of all, they learned too late that he was already married. And when they presented these considerations to Emmeline she said she did not care. She loved the man. Gently but firmly she explained that was the only thing that mattered; and one fine day she closed the door of the big house behind her and followed her lover into the wide world. Barring the mad wife, one is reminded of Lady Burton. She stowed away on his ship—he was bound for South America. She cut off her lovely hair and put on men's clothes and went beside him up into the Andes. She cheerfully endured cold and hunger and fatigue; when bandits tried to capture them she shot a man dead. And then, because to stay near him permanently would endanger his great project, she went back alone to South Kensington, took a little flat with a maid and a cat and a parrot and sat down to wait until Dyke had discovered the South Pole, or until his insane wife should find release. No one knew exactly where she had been. The manageress at the small hotel where she first put up in London insisted on lending her a pair of goloshes before allowing her to go out in the rain. Her family cut her dead. She cared very little. Death or life, she could face either for her lover; she outfaced them both and won at long last. She justified herself and her choice, but it took a great deal of character to do it. There is quaint humor in the scene where a young girl of 1920 comes to Emmeline to talk about running off with a young man, and is impatient of Emmeline's advice to be patient, thinking the old maid cannot appreciate her feelings. The whole book is very pleasant and easy reading.

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"MARY LEE" is high-pitched and shrilly emotional by comparison. Mr. Dennis lays the pathos on thick; Dickens himself never persecuted an orphan child with more gusto. Mary is starved, bullied, beaten black and blue by a cruel great-aunt and a murderous uncle; how she survived at all is a mystery. But she does, and at the age of eighteen suffers a sea-change, crossing the Channel from Devon to Brittany and turning into a green-eyed governess inevitably reminiscent of Becky Sharp. Yet she is something of Jane Eyre all the while; it is amusing to try to separate her into her component parts. Her story, considered as such, is too disconnected and confused to epitomize. It is incongruous, inconsistent, but strangely never quite uninteresting. And for all her derivations and borrowings, Mary Lee has life of her own, a basic streak of reality. Her lover is nothing but a name. Her father is impossible to the last degree; but others of the minor characters have a grotesque and horrible convincingness. They are endowed with the vitality of their author's hatred of them. The whole book, despite its patchwork suggestion and lack of form, has power.